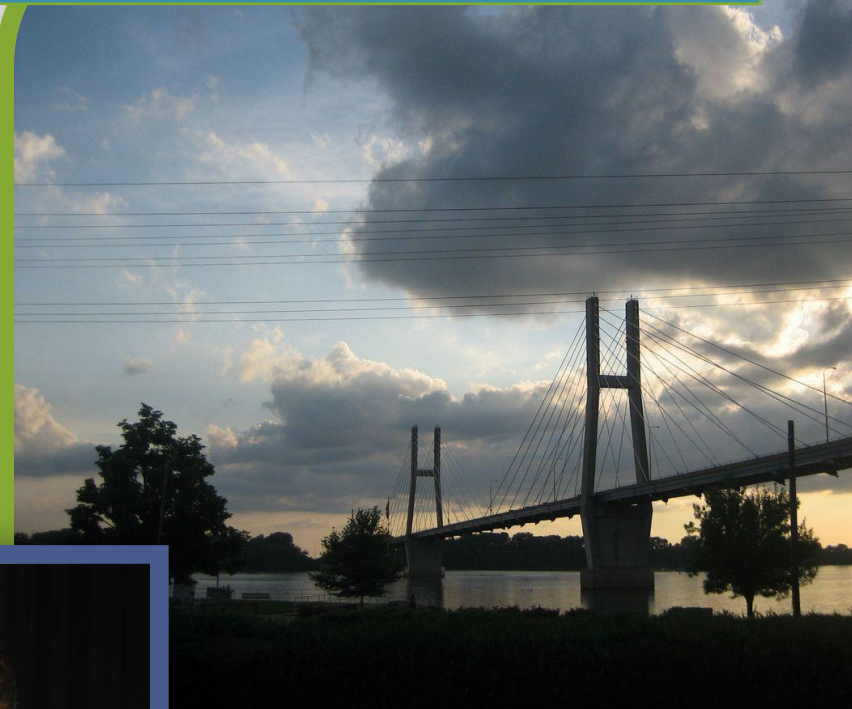


# Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty



Annual Report  
September 2013

## Acknowledgements

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## LETTER FROM COMMISSION CO-CHAIRS

September 2013

Dear Members of the Illinois General Assembly,

In 2008, with unanimous, bi-partisan support, the State of Illinois formed the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty to create a strategy that would support Illinois in the battle to end poverty. The Commission issued its recommended strategy in *Building a Pathway to Dignity & Work*, a report released in December of 2010. The attached Annual Progress Report fulfills the statutory directive that the Commission report annually on the implementation of its poverty elimination strategy and on progress the state has made toward the goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015.

The Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Poverty is an independent body focused on eliminating poverty in our state in a manner consistent with international human rights standards. As such, the Commission's charge is twofold:

- To create and monitor a specific, substantive, measurable strategic plan for cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015 in Illinois; and
- To offer advice and comment on state matters that may positively or negatively impact the state's goal of ending poverty.

As a state, we took significant strides forward in 2013 toward reducing extreme poverty and improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children in our state who are struggling to make ends meet. This year, the Commission was successful in advancing more bills that support our agenda than in any year since the formation of the Commission, setting the stage for reductions in extreme poverty in the years to come. Each piece of legislation represents one additional part of the multi-faceted set of solutions we must adopt to eliminate poverty. Enclosed you will find an overview of the progress made this year in cutting extreme poverty in the state.

While we have made some progress, we have a lot more work to do. The coming year will present increasing challenges as we continue to face difficult decisions related to the state budget and other priorities. We urge you to work with us to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable and uphold human rights by advancing policies that support Illinois in the fight against poverty.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Sid Mohn

Co-Chair, Commission on the Elimination of Poverty

President, Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Leslie Fields

Co-Chair, Commission on the Elimination of Poverty

Director of Policy, Office of the Governor

## INTRODUCTION

When the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty was formed in 2008, notably prior to the Great Recession, 607,247 Illinois residents lived in extreme poverty. Today, as the national recovery moves ahead at only a snail's pace, a total of 767,779 Illinoisans live in extreme poverty with incomes below half of the poverty line. That amounts to \$9,545 for a family of three in 2012. Although poverty rates rose for the first few years of the Commission's existence, Illinois saw a decrease in the number of people experiencing extreme poverty this past year.

Are we better off now than we were 5 years ago when Illinois established the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty? In some ways, yes; for the first time since the Commission was established the number of people living in extreme poverty in Illinois has decreased and policy makers made a number of budget and policy decisions that will undoubtedly contribute to declines in extreme poverty down the road. In other ways, this is a pivotal moment for Illinois that requires real leadership and renewed commitment to poverty reduction. As state lawmakers continue to face the state's daunting budget crisis and people in poverty face continued high unemployment and low-paying job prospects, now more than ever, it is essential that we protect and strengthen our safety net and continue to advance legislative solutions that will reduce extreme poverty.

During the 2013 legislative session of the 98<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, nine bills were introduced that the Poverty Commission recognized would have helped reduce poverty, and 4 of those bills passed both houses and were signed into law. State lawmakers also made a commitment to advance a fifth bill through an administrative solution. In addition, critical programs that have both kept individuals from falling into poverty and helped provide support for those experiencing extreme hardship did not suffer additional deep cuts through this year's budget process.



[Click here](#) to view video footage of the public hearings and listening sessions the Poverty Commission held throughout the state.

## MEASURING PROGRESS – DECREASES IN EXTREME POVERTY

For the first time since the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty was formed Illinois has seen a decrease in extreme poverty, with 75,000 fewer Illinoisans in extreme poverty over the prior year. Despite the modest decrease in extreme poverty in the short term, 6.0% of the state's population remains in extreme poverty, and the state has significant work to do to reach the 2015 goal.

While there are several valid sources of data on extreme poverty, the estimates presented in this section come from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement. This source was used because there is a tool associated with this data set that allows users to assess poverty with a more comprehensive measure. In future years, this more comprehensive measure of poverty may be used to benchmark Illinois' progress on its poverty reduction goal since the tool has the ability to capture the impact of many of the Commission's recommended policy and programmatic changes.

### A SNAPSHOT OF EXTREME POVERTY

2007-2008	2009-2010	2011-2012
607,247	823,406	767,779

### A CLOSER LOOK AT EXTREME POVERTY IN ILLINOIS Extreme Poverty by Race/Ethnicity

While there has been an overall increase of people living in extreme poverty, extreme poverty disproportionately affects minorities.

Race/Ethnicity	2012 Current Situation	Percent*
White Non-Hispanic	310,294	3.9%
Black Non-Hispanic	205,664	11.5%
Hispanic	193,016	9.4%

## Extreme Poverty by Age

Children are more likely to live in extreme poverty than adults.

Age	2012 Current Situation	Percent*
Children (0-17)	255,202	8.4%
Working Age (18-64)	468,961	5.9%
Seniors (65 and over)	43,615	2.5%

## Extreme Poverty by Disability Status

Working-age Illinoisans with a work-limiting disability have much higher rates of extreme poverty than their non-disabled counterparts.

Disability Status (Working Age)	2012 Current Situation	Percent*
With a Work-Limiting Disability	94,845	12.6%
No Work-Limiting Disability	374,116	5.2%

## A Senior, Child, or Working-Age Adult with a Work-Limiting Disability

Over half of all Illinoisans in extreme poverty are children, seniors, or working-age people with a work-limiting disability—people who cannot or are not expected to work.

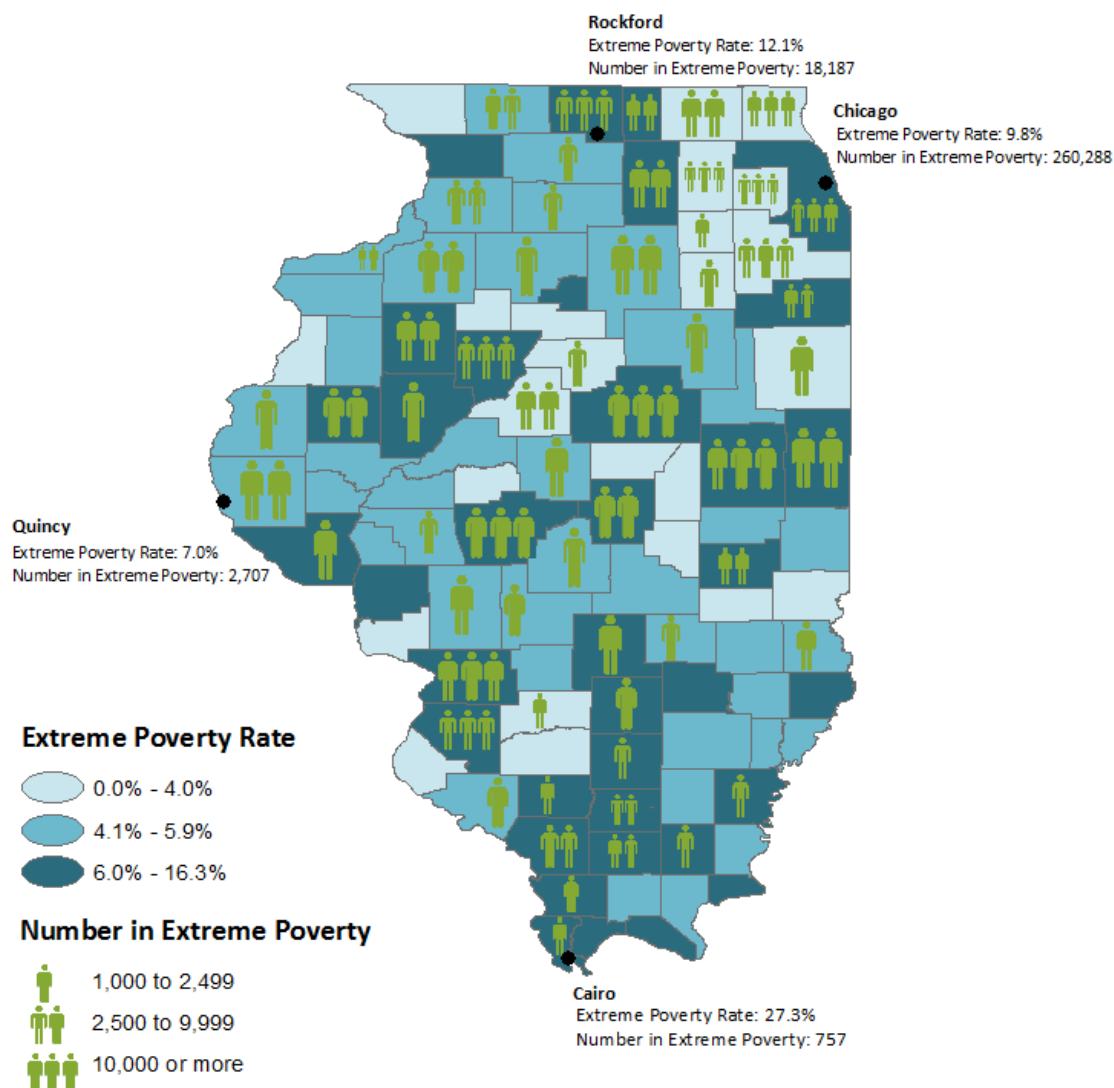
	2012 Current Situation
Unable or Not Expected to Work	393,662
As a % of Those in Extreme Poverty	51.2%

Data Source: Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Microdata. Based on Census Bureau recommendations on proper data use, these estimates are 2-year averages (2008 includes 2007 and 2008; 2012 includes 2011 and 2012) to help smooth out variation due to small sample size. For information on poverty in local Illinois communities, visit [www.ilpovertyreport.org](http://www.ilpovertyreport.org)

\*Percent represents the percentage of people in the demographic group who are extremely poor.

## EXTREME POVERTY IN ILLINOIS

Extreme poverty touches every county in Illinois. The map below indicates both the number of people experiencing extreme poverty in each county and the extreme poverty rate for each county. Although the urban and suburban areas of our state have the highest numbers of people experiencing poverty, many of our more rural, downstate counties have the highest concentrations of extreme poverty.



Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-year estimates program.



## THE COMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2010, the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty created a [comprehensive strategy](#) for cutting extreme poverty. The Commission's plan offers a comprehensive approach to address the complex and multi-faceted nature of poverty. Relying on public input, relevant census data, and research, members of the Commission developed a plan with a set of recommendations related to the following issues:

- Access to safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- Access to adequate food and nutrition.
- Access to affordable and quality healthcare.
- Equal access to quality education and training.
- Dependable and affordable transportation.
- Access to quality and affordable child care.
- Opportunities to engage in meaningful and sustainable work.
- The availability of adequate income supports.

Per the Commission's statutory mandate, the recommendations are consistent with international human rights standards. The Commissioners utilized human rights values and principles and a solid understanding of those impacted by extreme poverty to guide the development of the plan.

The information that follows offers an overview of legislative action taken this year that aligned with the Poverty Commission's recommendations to cut extreme poverty.

## CHANGE AGENDA – 2013 SUMMARY



*Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum/living wage and benefit standards: SB68—Minimum Wage Increase: **LOSING GROUND**.*



*Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards and eliminate categories of workers not covered by minimum wage: SB1708—Domestic Workers Bill of Rights: **LOSING GROUND**.*



*Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum/living wage and benefit standards: HB4497 and SB 1844—Automatic IRA (retirement savings for all workers): **LOSING GROUND**.*



*Adopt a policy to “Ban the Box,” also termed “Move the Box,” which prohibits state job applications from asking if an individual has a criminal background, and use the state’s leadership to encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds: HB1150—Ban the Box: **STALLED**.*



*Use the state’s leadership to encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds: HB3061—Felony Sealing: **MAKING PROGRESS**.*



*Ensure equal access to quality education and training: HB2213—Ensuring Success in School: **LOSING GROUND**.*



*Improve access to safe, decent, and affordable housing: SB56—Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure: **MAKING PROGRESS**.*



*Protect, restore, and enhance access to quality healthcare, including mental health and social and emotional well-being: SB26—Medicaid Expansion: **MAKING PROGRESS**.*



*Strengthen our safety net to ensure that households and individuals have their basic needs met and their dignity affirmed: HB2262—Removing the TANF Asset Test: **MAKING PROGRESS**.*

## PROGRESS TOWARD THE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

### Work Recommendations



#### SB68—Increase the Minimum Wage

**BILL SUMMARY**—SB68, Senate Amendment No. 3 amends the Minimum Wage Law and increases the minimum wage to \$10 an hour over the next 3 years.

**2013 OUTCOME**—SB68 was introduced by Senator Kimberly Lightford, but no further action was taken on the bill.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards:* Workers earning minimum wage have trouble meeting their basic needs, and minimum wage workers with children are struggling to provide for their families. A minimum wage worker working full time year-round earns roughly \$17,000 per year. That means that a single parent with two kids would fall below the federal poverty line (\$19,090 for a family of three in 2012) The minimum wage should provide workers a minimum standard of living necessary for health and well-being and keep working families out of poverty.



#### SB1708—Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

**BILL SUMMARY**—SB1708 establishes the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights. The bill provides workplace and benefit standards for domestic workers and removes the domestic worker exclusion from the Minimum Wage Act, the Human Rights Act, the Wages of Women and Minors Act, and the One Day Rest in Seven Act.

**2013 OUTCOME**—SB1708 was introduced by Senator Ira Silverstein, but no further action was taken on the bill.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards and eliminate categories of workers not covered by minimum wage:* Domestic workers, such as housekeepers, nannies and workers providing care for individuals with a disability or who are sick, convalescing, or elderly, have historically been excluded from many of the basic labor protections afforded to other Illinois workers. Many of the laws and policies that govern pay and conditions in the workplace simply do not apply to domestic workers. The Domestic Worker Bill of Rights would create labor standards that are currently lacking in this industry and ensure that domestic workers have a right to earn the minimum wage, the right to rest and meal periods, protections against sexual harassment, and other basic labor protections.



### **SB2400 and HB 2461—Illinois Automatic IRA Act**

**BILL SUMMARY**—SB2400 and HB2461 create the Illinois Automatic Individual Retirement Account (IRA) Program Act to be administered by the State Treasurer. The bills allow employees of established employers with 10 or more employees that do not offer a qualified retirement plan, to set aside a percentage of their wages to be deposited into an IRA trust fund administered by the State Treasurer's office at no long-term cost to the state.

**2013 OUTCOME**—SB2400 was introduced by Senator Daniel Biss, but no further action was taken on the bill. A subject matter hearing was held to further educate members on the Automatic IRA program. HB2461 was introduced by Representative Deborah Mell. The bill did not advance out of the House Financial Institutions Committee.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Improve workplace compensation by increasing minimum wage/living wage and benefit standards:* Most low-wage workers do not have access to benefits such as paid sick leave, health insurance, or employer-based retirement savings. Sixty percent of Illinois low-wage workers do not have access to an employer-based retirement plan. Improving benefit standards for the lowest-wage workers will help provide the stability needed for individuals and families to move out of extreme poverty and prevent workers from falling into poverty as they age and retire. More workers are retiring into poverty every year; for many low-income workers, their Social Security benefits are not enough to retire with dignity, without the support of a retirement plan.

## Access to Work Recommendations



### HB1150—Ban the Box

**BILL SUMMARY**—HB1150, House Amendment 1 prohibits the application for state employment from including a question related to the applicant's criminal record. Specifically, the bill bars the application from asking whether the applicant was convicted of or pled guilty to a criminal offense. An applicant may still be required to complete a release form granting the applicant's permission to conduct a background check, but an applicant will only be subject to a background check at the time of an interview or a conditional offer.

**2013 OUTCOME**—HB1150 was introduced by Representative La Shawn Ford. The bill passed out of the Restorative Justice Committee, but no further action was taken on the bill. Despite the fact that HB1150 did not advance in the General Assembly, the State of Illinois is working with Representative Ford, the Poverty Commission, and advocates to modify state hiring policies, such as removing the question regarding an applicant's criminal background from the preliminary state employment application to improve opportunity for people with criminal records.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Adopt a policy to “Ban the Box,” also termed “Move the Box,” which prohibits state job applications from asking if an individual has a criminal background, and use the state’s leadership to encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds:* Those re-entering society after incarceration need true opportunity after paying their debt to society. Unfortunately, many employers outright deny employment opportunities to anyone with a criminal record. The Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission has recognized that blanket policies denying employment based on a criminal record have a disparate impact on communities of color. Applicants should be denied a job based on merit or lack thereof, not on prejudice about their criminal background, which the box on the state employment application invites. While reasonable limits need to be in place for certain types of positions, removing the question regarding criminal records from the state application will open the door for more people to secure quality employment, reduce recidivism in the correctional system, and lead the way for other employers in the state to follow suit.



### HB3061—Felony Sealing

**BILL SUMMARY**—HB3061 expands eligibility for the sealing of non-violent felony offense records, from the current number of just three eligible offenses. HB3061 allows the courts to consider the sealing of five additional Class 3 and 4 felony convictions, including theft, retail theft, forgery, deceptive practice and possession of burglary tools.

**2013 OUTCOME**—HB3061 was sponsored by Representative LaShawn Ford and Senator Kwame Raoul and passed both houses of the General Assembly. The bill was signed into law by the Governor on August 2, 2013 ([Public Act 98-0142](#)).

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Use the state's leadership to encourage and promote the hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds:* Those re-entering society after incarceration need true opportunity after paying their debt to society. Unfortunately, many employers outright deny employment opportunities and many landlords deny housing to anyone with a criminal record. Allowing people with criminal convictions who have turned their life around to seal their record will reduce barriers to employment and housing for individuals with certain criminal backgrounds.

## Education Recommendations



### HB2213—Ensuring Success in School

**BILL SUMMARY**—HB2213 amends the School Code to include provisions that ensure the health, safety, and academic success of elementary and secondary students who are parents, expectant parents, or victims of domestic or sexual violence. The bill is based upon the [recommendations of the Ensuring Success in School Task Force’s report to the Illinois General Assembly](#), submitted in June 2010. Provisions include expanding what constitutes a “valid cause” for absences to include students’ pregnancy-related and parenting responsibilities;

related absences and absences for circumstances related to domestic or sexual violence; accommodations for students to ensure their health and safety in school; confidentiality protocols; and “ombudsperson”—a “go-to” person for confidential guidance and referrals for students, teachers, and other school personnel when issues related to this student population arises. The bill also amends the Student Records Act regarding the release of information related to a student’s status as a parent, expectant parent, or victim of domestic or sexual violence.

**2013 OUTCOME**—HB2213 was sponsored by Representative La Shawn Ford and Senator Kimberly Lightford. The bill passed out of the House and passed out of the Senate Education Committee. The bill, however, was later amended and the amended bill failed to pass out of the Senate Education Committee.

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Ensure equal access to quality education and training:* Students who are parents, expectant parents, or the victims of domestic or sexual violence face barriers to school success and school completion which then puts them at greater risk of experiencing extreme poverty.

## Housing Recommendations



### SB56—Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure

**BILL SUMMARY**—SB56 will make permanent federal protections for tenants, which sunset at the end of 2013. These protections include adequate notice to move and that most leases survive a foreclosure.

**2013 OUTCOME**—SB56 was sponsored by Senator Jacqueline Collins and Representative Kelly Cassidy. The bill was passed by both houses of the General Assembly and was signed into law by the Governor on August 21, 2013 ([Public Act 098-0514](#)).

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Improve access to safe, decent, and affordable housing:* Safe, decent, and affordable housing is the cornerstone of economic security. With investments in affordable housing and protections for renters and owners, people can pull through economic crises and remain stably housed.



## Healthcare Recommendations



### SB26—Medicaid Expansion

**BILL SUMMARY**—SB26 provides healthcare coverage for 342,000 uninsured, low-income adults without dependent children by enabling Illinois to receive \$4.6 billion in federal funding from 2014 through 2016.

**2013 OUTCOME**—SB26 was sponsored by Senator Heather Steans and Representative Sara Feigenholtz. The bill passed both houses of the General Assembly and was signed into law by the Governor on July 22, 2013 ([Public Act 98-0104](#)).

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Protect, restore, and enhance access to quality healthcare, including mental health and social and emotional well-being:* For individuals experiencing poverty, access to quality, affordable healthcare is essential for maintaining stability and moving out of poverty.

## Income Support Recommendations



### HB2262—TANF Asset Limit

**BILL SUMMARY**—HB2262 removes the asset test from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The bill would require the Illinois Department of Human Services to disregard savings and other assets when determining program eligibility.

**2013 OUTCOME**—HB2262 was sponsored by Representative Robyn Gabel and Senator Mattie Hunter. The bill was passed by both houses of the General Assembly and was signed into law by the Governor on July 29, 2013 ([Public Act 098-0114](#)).

**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT WOULD BE ADVANCED**—*Identify rules, policies, practices, and procedures that hinder the participation of eligible people in safety net programs and take effective action to remove barriers:* The asset limit prevents families from building emergency savings, which could pay for unexpected expenses like medical bills, car repairs, or childcare. Forcing families to further impoverish themselves to qualify for cash assistance or preventing families from building emergency savings makes it that much harder for them to build a financially secure future and withstand future setbacks.

## STATE BUDGET OVERVIEW

### Background

When the Commission released its plan to cut extreme poverty, it recognized that core to any poverty-reduction effort is support and enhancement of the network of human services and safety net programs that support people throughout Illinois—from ensuring access to food to providing the training to help someone become employed. Nonetheless, over the past several budget cycles, human services and safety net programs that reduce poverty have suffered significant cuts. Indeed, over the last five years, Illinois has:

- completely eliminated the Transitional Assistance and Child and Family Assistance programs
- significantly cut the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program
- significantly cut funding for community mental health
- slashed Medicaid, eliminating crucial adult dental coverage, increasing co-pays, and restricting prescription drug coverage
- cut programs like homelessness prevention, only restoring them at a fraction of pre-recession levels

Data shows that human services and safety net programs make a significant difference in the lives of people impacted by poverty. For example, child care assistance improves low-income mothers' chances of being employed, staying off of TANF, and having higher earnings.<sup>[1]</sup>

Any given one of the program cuts suffered in Illinois over the past several years represents a blow to people who are experiencing poverty, but taken together they amount to a dismantling of the safety net intended to help mitigate the worst of effects of poverty and help people get out and stay out of poverty.

### FY14 Budget

Due to continued pressures stemming from a slow economic recovery, an unresolved pension crisis, and lingering FY12 and FY13 liabilities, the beginning of the FY14 budgeting process brought with it continued fears that programs that support people experiencing poverty would once again suffer significant cuts. In April, however, the State realized over \$1 billion in one-time unexpected income-tax revenue. This unexpected revenue allowed lawmakers to address lingering liabilities from previous fiscal years and avoid additional deep cuts to human services.

As a result, human service and safety net programs did not suffer deep cuts in the FY14 budget. In addition, a handful of key programs received needed increases in their funding, including homeless youth programs and supportive housing. Additionally, \$14 million was allocated to fund the summer jobs for youth program.

### Looking Forward

On January 1, 2015, the temporary income tax increase passed in 2011 will expire. Furthermore, until lawmakers are able to resolve the state pension crisis, pensions will continue to eat into state general revenue funds. As a result, the state may have roughly \$2 billion less revenue in FY15. In FY16, the revenue loss will increase to about 5 billion dollars. As the FY15 budgeting process unfolds, decision makers and the public at large must not lose sight of the fact that poverty in Illinois remains at near unprecedented levels and that investments in human services and safety net programs make real differences in mitigating poverty and helping people move out of poverty.

In the year to come, Illinois must explore creative and responsible ways to increase available revenue and think strategically about its spending decisions in order to avoid dampening this year's successes and forcing the state to take further steps backwards in its efforts to fight extreme poverty.

<sup>[1]</sup> Rynell, A, Terpstra, A., Carrow, L., & Mobley, I. (2011, May). *The Social and Economic Value of Human Services*. Chicago: Social IMPACT Research Center.

## PUBLIC HEARINGS & LISTENING SESSIONS

The Commission on the Elimination of Poverty held two public hearings and two listening sessions to hear testimony from the public about how the state's actions as they relate to extreme poverty have been felt throughout the state. Over 100 people attended the hearings and listening sessions in Chicago, Rockford, Quincy, and Cairo.

The following themes emerged from the testimony provided. The testimony reinforces the charge of the commission, its human rights focus, and bolsters the impetus for its legislative agenda moving forward. A number of the recommendations presented will be promoted by the Commission in the upcoming legislative session.

### Quincy



[Click here](#) to view video footage of the public listening session the Poverty Commission held in Quincy, Illinois.

- **Affordable housing**—Many people struggle to afford the most affordable housing options in their community, including the minimum rent of \$50 that many pay for public housing. Supportive housing units and beds at shelters are full and do not even come close to meeting the need. Homelessness is prevalent, but more hidden because many people are couch-surfing or staying with friends and relatives.
- **Workforce development and training programs**—Investments should be made into subsidized employment programs, on-the-job training programs and training programs with links to high-growth occupations such as welding and healthcare. Access to additional training and subsidized employment programs will help provide more opportunities for the unemployed to incrementally gain the skills and experience they need to access employment in their industries.
- **Transportation**—In Quincy there is no public transportation available after 6:00 p.m. Lack of access to transportation is a significant barrier to employment for people experiencing poverty.

- **Barriers for individuals with backgrounds**—Criminal records are a significant barrier to gaining employment and to accessing housing. Many offenses are ineligible for sealing or expungement and the process for getting a criminal record sealed or expunged is a difficult task.
- **Racial disparities in employment opportunities**—The unemployment rate for African Americans, particularly African American youth is extremely high. Subsidized jobs programs or youth summer jobs programs are often the only way that youth of color have an opportunity to work.
- **Economic mobility**—Children born into poverty are faced with compounding disadvantages and limited opportunity for upward economic mobility. Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contributes to poor physical and mental health outcomes.
- **Minimum wage**—Minimum wage workers are struggling to provide for their families and meet their basic needs. Affording child care and healthcare on a minimum wage job for example, is nearly impossible. Workers are forced to make impossible choices (for example, buying food or paying rent, paying utility bills or paying for medicine) or are one flat tire or emergency room visit away from disaster.
- **Training needed for human service providers**—Individuals who are experiencing poverty and seeking services often are in crisis; they have experienced trauma or are in various states of agitation or stress when they first interact with providers. Front line staff do not always have the training and resources necessary to address the needs of people in crisis and under a myriad of stressors.
- **People impacted by poverty offer a valuable perspective**—In seeking solutions to address poverty, it is important that solutions are informed by and rooted in the experiences of people who are experiencing poverty or who have been impacted by poverty in the past. Having program participants or clients sit on boards or be involved in program development and/or service delivery can strengthen programs and help ensure that they are meeting the needs of the individuals and families they serve.
- **Streamline and simplify application for safety net programs**—While there are numerous programs and services to help people in poverty, the system is a complex web of requirements and paperwork that make seeking help difficult. Many people who are experiencing poverty are unaware of programs and services available to them. Complicated and excessive requirements deter people from certain programs and create barriers to accessing safety net programs and services. Programs should be easier to access for those most in need.

## Rockford



[Click here](#) to view video footage of the public hearing the Poverty Commission held in Rockford, Illinois.

- **Minimum wage** —The minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation while the cost of living continues to increase. It is extremely difficult to survive on a minimum wage job and more and more college-educated adults are forced to rely on minimum wage jobs. People who work for a living should be able to meet their basic needs and pay their bills, but they cannot make ends meet if they are only earning \$8.25 an hour.
- **Funding for employment and training programs**—People need access to jobs that provide wages if we want to cut poverty in the state. The state should invest in Transitional Jobs programs and the Job Training and Economic Development Program (JTED) because they are two programs that are targeted to individuals experiencing poverty with barriers to employment. Both programs provide people who are unemployed and underemployed with the tools necessary to move out of poverty through work.
- **Senior services**—Access to adequate food and nutrition, healthcare and support services to remain independent are critical for seniors. When seniors do not have access to the programs and services that they need, more costly interventions are required later.
- **Source of income protections**—Often people who are experiencing poverty face significant barriers to housing because landlords will not rent to individuals based on their source of income. Source of income should be added to the Illinois Human Rights Act to ensure that individuals receiving TANF, unemployment, housing subsidies, or disability do not face discrimination and added barriers to accessing housing.
- **Racial disparities in unemployment**—Unemployment rates are significantly higher among minorities, particularly African Americans, across all levels of educational attainment. The unemployment rate among youth of color is staggering and deserves more attention and a targeted response.

## Cairo

- **Lack of jobs** —There are very few job opportunities in the area. Often when there are positions that require more specialized skills or training, employers are not able to hire locally to fill those positions. When local talent is developed, more often than not people are forced to leave to find opportunity elsewhere.
- **Lack of economic development** —Both the city and the state need a much more coordinated and creative approach to economic development in Cairo and the region. The location should be attractive to businesses - at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and along major interstate highways - but more needs to be done to attract new business and develop and support local initiatives.
- **Utility rates**—For low-income households utility debt and overall utility costs can be a huge burden. High utility costs may also be a deterrent for businesses that may otherwise consider the area and a significant barrier for local entrepreneurs.
- **Investments in youth**—There is very little positive development activities for youth in the community. Teen REACH funds were cut this past year leaving almost no supervised, constructive activities available for youth. There is no community center, no after-school programming, and no opportunities for summer jobs for youth.
- **Supports for young parents** —Parenting classes and other supports for young parents, in particular, could go a long way to provide struggling families the support they need to move out of poverty.
- **Lack of public transportation**—There is no public transportation in the area. Lack of access to transportation is a significant barrier to getting and keeping a job and to accessing healthcare and other programs and services.
- **Stigma associated with utilizing public benefits and services**—People are often hesitant and sometimes unwilling to access programs or services available to them because of their negative feelings associated with social welfare programs. Even when seeking temporary assistance, they may feel reluctant to enroll.

## Chicago



[Click here](#) to view video footage of the public hearing the Poverty Commission held in Chicago, Illinois.

- **Children's savings accounts**—Providing a savings account for every child will help ensure a brighter future for all Illinois children by increasing educational attainment, providing opportunity to build savings over a lifetime, and strengthen financial stability for families.
- **Lack of youth programs**—Particularly in certain neighborhoods there is a lack of recreational or community centers and a lack of after-school programs for youth.
- **Automatic IRA**—Automatic IRAs are a solution to help hard-working people save for retirement, prevent overreliance on Social Security, and prevent people from falling into poverty later in life. The creation of a statewide infrastructure to provide retirement accounts to workers would extend savings to nearly 50% of Illinois' workforce who are not currently offered this opportunity by their employers.
- **Investment in employment and training programs**—Subsidized employment programs, Transitional Jobs programs and the Job Training and Economic Development Program (JTED) all provide real opportunities for individuals experiencing poverty with barriers to employment. Rather than cutting funding for such programs, the state should be dedicating additional resources to ensure pathways back to work for the unemployed.
- **Supports for those re-entering society**—Individuals who are returning to their communities after being incarcerated face incredible challenges. Many employers outright deny employment opportunities and many landlords deny housing to anyone with a criminal record. The state must do more to make sure that those re-entering society after incarceration have the opportunity to rebuild their lives after paying their debt to society. A criminal conviction or mistake in one's past should not lead to a sentence of a life in extreme poverty.



## LOOKING FORWARD TO 2014

The recommendations outlined in *Building a Pathway to Dignity & Work*, the poverty elimination strategy released in December of 2010, will continue to inform the work of the Poverty Commission and provide a guide for decision makers and advocates committed to advancing solutions for individuals experiencing poverty. The recommendations outlined in the Commission's plan are not the only solutions to addressing extreme poverty. As such, the Commission will continue to weigh in on policy proposals that will positively or negatively impact the state's progress toward the goal of reducing extreme poverty and will continue to seek opportunities to work with policymakers to seek solutions.

While leaders in Illinois took positive steps toward addressing extreme poverty this year, Illinois is still experiencing near unprecedented levels of poverty in the wake of the economic downturn. As the state's budget situation continues to erode, it is critical that our leaders do not lose sight of the achievable goal of halving extreme poverty. By working together to advance policy and budget solutions that help people meet their most basic human needs and move out of extreme poverty, we create stronger communities and a stronger Illinois.

Three areas of focus for the Commission in 2014 will include:

- Strengthen the safety net and network of community-based human service programs to ensure households and individuals have their basic needs met and their dignity affirmed.
- Create true pathways to work for those who have been detached from the workforce and need supports to be successful by reducing barriers to employment and investing in employment and training programs such as Transitional Jobs and the Job Training and Economic Development Program.
- Ensure that when someone is engaged in work, they are not living in poverty by improving workplace compensation and benefit standards through increasing the state minimum wage, and passing a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and the Automatic-IRA bill.

With strong leadership and collaboration among all of us—those impacted by poverty, community stakeholders, and decision makers—we can take targeted, meaningful action to end poverty.

## COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

### *Co-chairs:*

**Leslie Fields—Director of Policy, Office of the Governor**

**Rev. Dr. Sid L. Mohn—President, Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights**

### *Elected Officials:*

Michael Frerichs—State Senator

Jacqueline Collins—State Senator

Sandra Pihos—State Representative

Robyn Gabel—State Representative

### *Public Members:*

Michael B. Golden—Co-Founder, One Million Degrees

Jim Hires—Executive Director, Eastern Illinois Food Bank

Catherine Holland—Executive Director, Stone-Hayes Center for Independent Living

Andy Kulczycki—Executive Director, Community Service Center of Northern Champaign County

**Dwight Lucas—Chief Executive Officer, East Central Illinois Community Action Association**

Eithne McMenamin—Associate Director, City Affairs, Chicago Coalition of the Homeless

Gayle Nelson—Development Consultant and Leadership Coach

Wendy Pollack—Director, Women’s Law & Policy Project, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

**Al Riddley—Executive Director, Illinois Coalition for Community Services**

**Dan Schwick—Assistant to the President/Director, Office of Church and Government Relations, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois**

**Maria Whelan—President, Illinois Action for Children**

Diane Williams—President & CEO, Safer Foundation

### *Ex-Officio Members:*

Stephen Konya III—Illinois Department of Public Health

Brianna Baker-Carvell—Illinois Department of Corrections

Sheila Chalmers-Currin—Office of the Lieutenant Governor, State of Illinois

John Holton—Illinois Department of Aging

Mike Jones—Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services

Hector Villagrana—Illinois Department of Human Rights

Vinni Hall—Illinois State Board of Education

Kara Teeple—Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Marisol Morales—Commissioner, Illinois Latino Family Commission

Antonio Baxton—Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

Fernando Chavarria—Illinois Department of Economic Security

Michelle Saddler—Illinois Department of Human Services

Terry Solomon—Illinois African American Family Commission

**\*Steering Committee members are listed in bold**

## PUBLIC HEARINGS & LISTENING SESSIONS TESTIMONY

### *Quincy Listening Session: August 6-7, 2013*

Crystal Young—Redmon and Lee Youth & Adult Community Association  
 Cathy Schluckebier—City of Quincy Department of Planning & Development  
 Glenda Hackemack—City of Quincy  
 Heidi Welty—The Salvation Army of Quincy  
 Lt. Rich Forney—The Salvation Army  
 Lt. Linnea Forney—The Salvation Army  
 Carolyn White—Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials  
 Becky Pruden—Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials  
 Mary Muehlenfeld—YWCA of Quincy  
 Shaq Hill  
 Emily Robbearts—United Way of Adams County  
 Joanne Dedert—Madonna House  
 Jerry Gille—Quincy Housing Authority  
 Elaine Davis—Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials  
 Howard Kirchner—Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials  
 Jan Green  
 Joyce Tyler  
 Sheldon Smith  
 Jennifer Harmon

### *Rockford Public Hearing: August 21, 2013*

Steve Simmons—Chicago Jobs Council  
 Mike Hughes—Lifescape Community Services  
 Ron Clewer—Rockford Housing Authority  
 AJ Young—Prairie State Legal Services  
 Cornelius Talley  
 John “Tac” Brantley  
 Linda Amos

### *Cairo Listening Session August 26-27, 2013*

Fred Bernstein—Community Health Services  
 Esther Mead—Illinois Department of Children and Family Services  
 Trina Mayfield—Illinois Department of Children and Family Services  
 Alecia Butler—Illinois Department of Children and Family Services  
 Kathy Goodbread—Olive Branch Area Community Development Corporation  
 Ken Goodbread—Olive Branch Area Community Development Corporation  
 Anganetta Terry—Illinois Department of Children and Family Services  
 Derek Eurales  
 Ruth Oliver  
 Lacie Betts—Happy Helpers Pantry  
 Mariah Betts—Happy Helpers Pantry  
 Deborah Gates-Burklow—The Old School Community Center

*Chicago Public Hearing: September 3, 2013*

Rosazlia Grillier—Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)

Lucy Mullany—Illinois Asset Building Group, Heartland Alliance

Mark Sanders II—North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)

Thad J. Smith—Graduate of NLEN's U-Turn Permitted Program

Brenda Palms Barber—North Lawndale Employment Network

Vincent Franklin—Graduate of NLEN's U-Turn Permitted Program

Lannon Broughton

Angel Jackson—Graduate of Chinese American Service League's Chef Training Program

Shelly Haley—Graduate of Chinese American Service League's Chef Training Program

Ricky Lam—Chinese American Service League

Tony Lowery—The Safer Foundation

Francine Washington

Betty Thompson

Shaniece Alexander—Growing Home Inc.